

Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on: *The Lovely Bones*

Author: Alice Sebold

Family: Born c. 1963; married Glen David Gold (a writer). **Education:** Studied at Syracuse University, 1980-c.84; graduated from University of Houston; University of California--Irvine, M.F.A., 1998. **Addresses:** Home: CA. Agent: c/o Author Mail, Little, Brown & Company/Warner Books, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

Career:

Writer and teacher.

Awards:

Bram Stoker Award for best first novel and nomination for best novel, Horror Writers Association, both 2002, for *The Lovely Bones*.

Writings by the Author

Lucky (memoir), Scribner (New York, NY), 1999.

The Lovely Bones: A Novel, Little, Brown (Boston, MA), 2002.

Media Adaptations:

The Lovely Bones was adapted as a screenplay by Lynne Ramsay and Liana Dognini, to be directed by Ramsay and produced by Aimee Peyronnet in conjunction with FilmFour.

Name: Alice Sebold

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Author: Alice Sebold (2)

Sidelights:

Alice Sebold's first published book was a memoir of her rape as an eighteen-year-old college freshman. Titled *Lucky* because one of the policemen told her that she was lucky to be alive—not long before Sebold's attack, another young woman had been killed and dismembered in the same tunnel—the book was many years in the making. Sebold returned to Syracuse University, the scene of the rape, and finished her degree. She studied writing, and wanted to write her story then, but kept failing. "I wrote tons of bad poetry about it and a couple of bad novels about it—lots of bad stuff," Sebold told Dennis McLellan of the *Los Angeles Times*. She explained to McLellan why the novels were not successful: "I felt the burden of trying to write a story that would encompass all rape victims' stories and that immediately killed the idea of this individual character in the novel. So [the novels] tended to be kind of fuzzy and bland, and I didn't want to make any political missteps."

Sebold continued trying to write after graduation and moved to New York City, where she lived for ten years. "I worked a lot of different jobs and became a competent New Yorker, which is no small task, and went through a lot of stuff and rediscovered reading on my own and I became more honest to who I was, which matters a lot. I went out a lot. I would go to a lot of readings. I did a lot of things that I'm not particularly proud of and that I can't believe I did," she recalled in a talk she gave at the University of California—Irvine (UCI) as recorded by Ehzra Cue on the UCI Web site. At that talk, Sebold presented climbing to the top of the Manhattan Bridge as an example of something she can't believe she did; in other forums, she has also discussed the three years during which she used heroin while she was living in New York.

Lucky began to take shape in the late 1990s, when Sebold was studying fiction writing at a graduate program at UCI. A ten-page assignment sparked her to write forty pages about the rape. Although none of that writing was itself included in the final book, the experience was the impetus for Sebold to begin doing research and putting her memoir together. She read through old letters and journal entries, the transcripts of her rapist's trial, and even returned to Syracuse and talked to the former assistant district attorney who had helped to prosecute the man, allowing her, even fifteen years after the attack, to tell the story in great detail. The result is "a remarkable personal look at a crime all too common in our out-of-whack society," wrote *Toronto Sun* reviewer Yvonne Crittenden. Despite her dark subject matter, "Sebold's wit is as powerful as her searing candor," remarked a *Publishers Weekly* contributor.

Sebold's second book, *The Lovely Bones: A Novel*, is similarly dark in topic. Its narrator, fourteen-year-old Susie Salmon, is raped and killed by a neighbor at the beginning of the book. She narrates the story of her death—and of her family, her friends, and herself coming to terms with it—in the first person from her omniscient seat in heaven. This is "Sebold's most dazzling stroke," declared a *Publishers Weekly* reviewer, as it "provid[es] the warmth of a first-person narration and the freedom of an omniscient one." That omniscience is necessary, since Susie's tale encompasses several different stories: Susie's mother's search to build a new life away from the family after the murder; her father's quest to find the real killer, into which Susie's teenage sister Lindsay is drawn and which puts her at great risk from the same killer; and Susie's vicarious living-out of her own teen and young adult years through Lindsay. "What might play as a sentimental melodrama in the hands of a lesser writer becomes in this volume a keenly observed portrait of familial love and how it endures and changes over time," Michiko Kakutani declared in the *New York Times*.

In an interview with *Publishers Weekly*, Sebold said that writing *The Lovely Bones* "was a delight, because I loved my main character so much and I liked being with her. It was like having company. I was motivated to write about violence because I believe it's not unusual. I see it as just a part of life, and I think we get in trouble when we separate people who've experienced it from those who haven't. Though it's a horrible experience, it's not as if violence hasn't affected many of us."



Author: Alice Sebold (3)

Further Readings About The Author:

Periodicals:

Buffalo News (Buffalo, NY), August 15, 1999, Louise Continelli, "Victims' Advocate and Author Is Doomed to Live with the Nightmare of Being Raped," p. C2.

Herald (Glasgow, Scotland), September 15, 2001, "Glen David Gold," p. 2.

Kirkus Reviews, May 1, 2002, review of *The Lovely Bones: A Novel*, p. 608.

Library Journal, June 15, 1999, Janice Dunham, review of *Lucky*, p. 92.

Los Angeles Times, September 15, 1999, Dennis McLellan, "Memoir Frees Writer from Dark Days of Her Past," p. 2.

New York Times, June 18, 2002, Michiko Kakutani, "The Power of Love Leaps the Great Divide of Death," p. E1.

Publishers Weekly, June 21, 1999, review of *Lucky*, p. 44; June 17, 2002, review of *The Lovely Bones*, p. 40, Anne Darby, "PW Talks with Alice Sebold," p. 41.

Sunday Herald (Glasgow, Scotland), February 10, 2002, "Hollywood Break for Lynne's Lovely Bones," p. 11.

Toronto Sun, October 23, 1999, Yvonne Crittenden, "Not So Lucky."

Other:

Random House, <http://www.randomhouse.com/> (June 18, 2002), "Boldtype: Conversation with Aimee Bender and Alice Sebold."

University of California--Irvine, <http://www.uci.edu/> (June 18, 2002), Ehzra Cue, "Alice Sebold's 'An Evening of Fiction'"; Michaela Baltasar, "UCI MFA Graduate Says She Is Lucky."

Source: Contemporary Authors Online, Gale, 2003.

Source Database: Contemporary Authors



Author: Alice Sebold (4)

PW Talks with Alice Sebold:

Critics: Alice Sebold and Ann Darby

Source: Publishers Weekly 249, no. 24 (17 June 2002): 41

Criticism About: *Alice Sebold* (c. 1963-)

[(Interview date 17 June 2002) In the following interview, Sebold discusses her narrative choices in *The Lovely Bones* and her plans for her next novel.]

[Darby]: Your memoir [Lucky] focused on rape—your brutal rape when you were a student at Syracuse University in 1981. Your novel, *The Lovely Bones* (reviewed on p. 40), is about a rape and murder. Was it a relief, or a horror, to re-imagine a rape?

[Sebold]: Oddly, it was a delight, because I loved my main character so much and I liked being with her. It was like having company. I was motivated to write about violence because I believe it's not unusual. I see it as just a part of life, and I think we get in trouble when we separate people who've experienced it from those who haven't. Though it's a horrible experience, it's not as if violence hasn't affected many of us.

The reader learns on the first page that your narrator, Susie Salmon, has been murdered. But how did you come to place her in heaven?

Chang Rae Lee says, "Competency kills." Well, I was working on another, perfectly competent novel, but it didn't have any life to it. I read poetry all the time—poems free me—so I went off and read some poetry, and when I came back to my desk, I wrote the first chapter of *The Lovely Bones* almost exactly as it stands, with Susie in heaven. It was what writers pray for. You just become the channel for a voice.

So what is your idea of heaven?

For me, heaven would be a lack of alienation. The whole time I was growing up, I felt comfort was inherently evil. I think that for me heaven isn't about couches and milk shakes and never having a troubling thought again. As opposed to a place that is just blinding comfort, I gave Susie a place to investigate, a place where she could come to understand the world and the people in her life.

The reader also learns early on who murdered Susie. Why did you make her murderer a builder of dollhouses?

In a way, it was self-indulgent. I'm fascinated with structure and buildings. But it also fits his character, as something that helps him give his life structure. I think people who commit these crimes often try not to. One of the ways he tried to control himself was to work on these complex structures. He had all these tricks, like setting alarms and timers, to help him control his universe.

Little, Brown seems to have embraced this book. What is your relationship with them like?

My story with Little, Brown is unusual. My novel was acquired and orphaned twice within 10 months, so it should have been a catastrophe. Yet it wasn't. The book was embraced by a variety of people within the



Author: Alice Sebold (5)

PW Talks with Alice Sebold (Continued)

company by the time the complete draft was handed in, including Michael Pietsch [senior v-p/publisher]. Michael has said that things keep happening in a very nice way, and that's the way it happened in-house. It's a little bit of a come-from-behind thing.

Is Little, Brown taking any unusual steps to publicize the book?

This is my first novel, so I don't know what's usual. My publicist Heather Fain, who's great, called up a couple months ago to tell me that normally she'd be calling to say there'd be no tour, but instead they were sending me on an eight-city tour. Then two other cities were added. Little, Brown had to print a thousand extra copies of the galleys for BEA, and Anna Quindlen mentioned *The Lovely Bones* during her summer reading roundup on The Today Show.

Have the movie rights been optioned?

Movie rights have been optioned by Luc Besson and Film Four, a British production company. The script is just finished, though I haven't read it. It was written by the movie's director, Lynn Ramsay, and her writing partner. It strikes me that they'll make their own movie out of it. I have hopes that with a small company based in Europe, the movie will be driven by their vision rather than by a committee.

Are you working on a new novel for Little, Brown?

Yes, I'm about 200 pages into this one, and I have my characters and my story.

Does the success of *The Lovely Bones* set the bar too high for your next book? Does it make you nervous?

I'm only worried about having to take time off. I wanted to be a novelist for so long. My husband [Glen David Gold, author of *Carter Beats the Devil*] and I failed for a long time before we succeeded, so we cherish the success.

Source: Alice Sebold and Ann Darby, "PW Talks with Alice Sebold." *Publishers Weekly* 249, no. 24 (17 June 2002): 41.



Author: Alice Sebold (6)

Joyce Carol Oates' Comments on *The Lovely Bones*

Critics: Joyce Carol Oates

Source: Times Literary Supplement, no. 5229 (20 June 2003)

Criticism About: Alice Sebold (c. 1963-)

[(Review date 20 June 2003) In the following review, Oates calls *Lucky* an "exemplary memoir," asserting that the memoir is original and direct.]

Alice Sebold is the author of the first novel *The Lovely Bones* (2002), one of those bestsellers described as "runaway" to distinguish them from more lethargic bestsellers that merely slog along selling copies in the six-figure range. Though deftly marketed as an adult novel with a special appeal to women, *The Lovely Bones* is in fact a young-adult novel of unusual charm, ambition and originality. Its most obvious literary predecessor is Thornton Wilder's *Our Town*, in which the deceased Emily is granted omniscient knowledge of family, friends and community after her death; a subtly orchestrated wish-fulfilment fantasy that allows audiences to weep, and at the same time feel good about weeping. Not the deep counterminings of tragic adult literature here, which suggests that death is not only painful but permanent, and that we are not likely to hover above our families as they mourn us, but a fantasy in which an event of surpassing horror (a fourteen-year-old girl raped, murdered, dismembered by a neighbour who is never apprehended for the crime) is very sketchily narrated in the first chapter, to provide background for a story of mourning, healing and redemption: "Heaven wasn't perfect. But I came to believe that if I watched closely, and desired, I might change the lives of those I loved on Earth".

The Lovely Bones might be called "inspirational" fiction in its simulation of tragedy in the service of survival, since its goal is to confirm what we wish we could believe and not to un-settle us with harsh, intransigent truths about human cruelty. Written with the wry panache of contemporary young-adult fiction, its tone gamely "light" and chatty, *The Lovely Bones* is something of an anomaly: a "survivor" tale that is in fact narrated from Heaven. Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11 that left many Americans stunned and reeling, yearning to be assured of the possibility of Heaven and the immortality of the human soul, the extraordinary success of Alice Sebold's first novel is perhaps not so mysterious. Like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, another young-adult novel skilfully marketed for an adult audience, *The Lovely Bones* tells a good story, and provides us with good, sympathetic characters with whom we can "identify."

For those to whom *The Lovely Bones* is simply too sugary a confection to swallow, Sebold's memoir *Lucky*, the author's first book (published in the United States in 1999), will be something of a revelation, if not a shock. For *Lucky* is an utterly realistic, unsparing and distinctly unsugary account of violent rape and its aftermath in the author's life, based upon her experience as an eighteen-year-old freshman at Syracuse University in May 1981. Where the novel transports us immediately to a fantasy Heaven, the memoir transports us immediately to very plausible Hell:

In the tunnel where I was raped, a tunnel that was once an underground entry to an amphitheater ... a girl had been murdered and dismembered. I was told this by the police. In comparison, they said, I was lucky.

Lucky is terse, ironic, controlled and graphic. It begins with a literally blow-by-blow account of the protracted beating and rape suffered by Sebold as a university freshman surprised in a park by an assailant who will turn out to be a resident of the city of Syracuse with a prior police record, a young black man so arrogantly self-assured that, when he and Sebold accidentally meet on a Syracuse street some months after the rape, he laughs at her terror: "Hey, girl. Don't I know you from somewhere?" After the ordeal of a preliminary hearing and a trial during which the rapist's defence attorney attacks Sebold's testimony with every weapon allowed in courtroom procedure, her rapist is found guilty of first-degree counts of rape and sodomy and is sentenced to eight to



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Joyce Carol Oates' Comments on *The Lovely Bones*: (Continued)

twenty-five years in prison—with time off for good behaviour, the minimum eight years could be considerably reduced. Should anyone imagine that a jury verdict of “guilty” is a happy ending to any crime case, Sebold notes that the rape of her friend and room-mate the following year in Syracuse is theorized by police to have been a “revenge” rape committed by friends of the convicted man, and includes a harrowing final chapter in which she speaks of years of drinking, drug addiction and psychological unease that followed her rape: “I loved heroin. Ecstasy and mushrooms and acid trips? Who wanted to enhance a mood? My goal was to destroy it.”

Ours is the age of what might be called the New Memoir: the memoir of sharply focused events, very often traumatic, in distinction to the traditional life-memoir. The New Memoir is frequently written by the young or relatively young, the traditional memoir is usually the province of the older. In this sub-genre, the motive isn't to write a memoir because one is an individual of stature or accomplishment, in whom presumably readers might be interested, but to set forth out of relative anonymity the terms of one's physical/psychological ordeal; in most cases, the ordeal is survived, so that the memoirist moves through trauma into coping and eventual recovery. Though the literary structure may sound formulaic, exemplary memoirs like *Lucky* break the formula with their originality of insight and expression. Like most good prose works, *Lucky* is far from unambiguous: the memoir can be read as an alarming and depressing document, and it can be read as genuinely “uplifting.” The pivotal point in Sebold's recovery doesn't occur until years after the rape when, ironically, she comes upon her own case discussed in Dr. Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* in terms of “post traumatic stress disorder.”

[Individuals suffering from this disorder] do not have a normal “baseline” level of alert but relaxed attention. Instead, they have a baseline of arousal: their bodies are always on the alert for danger. ... Traumatic events appear to recondition the human nervous system.

The act of writing a memoir can be seen, ideally, as an act of reclaiming the victim's very nerves. Having been encouraged by her admirable writing instructors at Syracuse, Tess Gallagher and Tobias Wolff, to remember as much as she can and to write freely about it, Sebold will come in time to discover that memory could save, that it had power, that it [is] often the only recourse of the powerless, the oppressed or the brutalized.

When Sebold was raped at the age of eighteen she was, unlike the majority of her classmates, a virgin, inexperienced in sexual matters. This fact would be many times reiterated in police and court documents as if, had the victim not been a virgin, the rapist's assault would not have been so heinous and the victim's claim of rape might have been undermined. The (suspicious, male) detective assigned to Sebold's case is finally more sympathetic because Sebold was a virgin than he would have been otherwise, though in his initial report, after having interrogated the injured, dazed, exhausted and sedated Sebold at length, in the middle of the night, the detective comes to the thoroughly unwarranted and arbitrary conclusion that Sebold was not being “completely factual” and that her case should be referred to the “inactive file.” After Sebold's painfully vivid description of the assault and rape, the quoted police report is a masterpiece of banality, its flat, stereotypical language seemingly calculated to minimize the horrific experience.

It will be upsetting for many readers, and certainly for women, to learn that the rape victim must “perform” convincingly, if she is to be believed. In giving police and courtroom testimony, it isn't enough to simply tell the truth (“if you just tell the truth, you lose”); one must play a prescribed victim-role, dress the part as deliberately as if one were appearing in a stage play, and above all appear innocent, humble, even repentant and apologetic in the face of others' suspicions (“Juror: Didn't you know that you are not supposed to go through the park after nine-thirty at night? Didn't you know that?”) Sebold endures the ordeal of the trial with a minimum of bitterness: “While still in court I thanked the jury. I drew on my resources: performing, placating, making my family smile. As I left that courtroom I felt I had put on the best show of my life.” Sebold's experience helps to explain why, in the United States, it is believed that approximately 50 per cent of rapes are never reported to police. For many women, the ordeal of rape's aftermath is simply not worth it.



Author: Alice Sebold (8)

Joyce Carol Oates' Comments on *The Lovely Bones*: (Continued)

Lucky is interlarded with astonishing remarks made to Sebold by well-intentioned but unthinking individuals, including Sebold's father: "How could he have raped you unless you let him?" Comparing Sebold with her allegedly more sensitive sister, Mr. Sebold says: "If it had to happen to one of you, I'm glad it was you and not your sister." Another classic line is delivered by a feminist psychiatrist: "Well, I guess this will make you less inhibited about sex now, huh?" After Sebold has managed to write a poem expressing hatred of her rapist a fellow (male) poet protests not to understand: "You're a beautiful girl." Months after the rape, when Alice Sebold is trying gamely to lead a normal life, she assures a man in whom she is romantically interested that she has had sex three times since the rape, though in fact she has not had sex, and he says with approval: "That's a good amount. Just enough to know you're normal". The most devastating of remarks, however, is delivered by the rapist himself when he sees his victim naked: "You're the worst bitch I ever done this to."

Where *The Lovely Bones* ends with the greeting-card sentiment, "I wish you all a long and happy life," *Lucky* ends on a more ambivalent note: "It is later now, and I live in a world where the two truths coexist; where both hell and hope lie in the palm of my hand." That the victim-memoirist would one day make of her trauma the "runaway" *The Lovely Bones* is a wonderfully ironic turnabout no one, surely not the victim, could have foreseen.

Source: Joyce Carol Oates, "Trauma, Coping, Recovery." *Times Literary Supplement*, no. 5229 (20 June 2003): 15.



Reading Group Guide

Spotlight on: *The Lovely Bones*

About This Book:

When we first meet Susie Salmon, she is already in heaven. As she looks down from this strange new place, she tells us, in the fresh and spirited voice of a fourteen-year-old girl, a tale that is both haunting and full of hope.

In the weeks following her death, Susie watches life on Earth continuing without her—her school friends trading rumors about her disappearance, her family holding out hope that she'll be found, her killer trying to cover his tracks. As months pass without leads, Susie sees her parents' marriage being contorted by loss, her sister hardening herself in an effort to stay strong, and her little brother trying to grasp the meaning of the word gone.

And she explores the place called heaven. It looks a lot like her school playground, with the good kind of swing sets. There are counselors to help newcomers adjust and friends to room with. Everything she ever wanted appears as soon as she thinks of it—except the thing she most wants: to be back with the people she loved on Earth.

With compassion, longing, and a growing understanding, Susie sees her loved ones pass through grief and begin to mend. Her father embarks on a risky quest to ensnare her killer. Her sister undertakes a feat of remarkable daring. And the boy Susie cared for moves on, only to find himself at the center of a miraculous event.

The Lovely Bones is luminous and astonishing, a novel that builds out of grief the most hopeful of stories. In the hands of a brilliant new writer, this story of the worst thing a family can face is transformed into a suspenseful and even funny novel about love, memory, joy, heaven, and healing.

Discussion Questions:

1. In Susie's Heaven, she is surrounded by things that bring her peace. What would your Heaven be like? Is it surprising that in Susie's inward, personal version of the hereafter there is no God or larger being that presides?
2. Why does Ruth become Susie's main connection to Earth? Was it accidental that Susie touched Ruth on her way up to Heaven, or was Ruth actually chosen to be Susie's emotional conduit?
3. Rape is one of the most alienating experiences imaginable. Susie's rape ends in murder and changes her family and friends forever. Alienation is transferred, in a sense, to Susie's parents and siblings. How do they each experience loneliness and solitude after Susie's death?
4. Why does the author include details about Mr. Harvey's childhood and his memories of his mother? By giving him a human side, does Sebald get us closer to understanding his motivation? Sebald explained in an interview about the novel that murderers "are not animals but men," and that is what makes them so frightening. Do you agree?



Book: The Lovely Bones (2)

Discussion Questions (Continued):

5. Discuss the way in which guilt manifests itself in the various characters - Jack, Abigail, Lindsay, Mr. Harvey, Len Fenerman.
6. "Pushing on the inbetween" is how Susie describes her efforts to connect with those she has left behind on Earth. Have you ever felt as though someone was trying to communicate with you from "the inbetween?"
7. Does Buckley really see Susie, or does he make up a version of his sister as a way of understanding, and not being too emotionally damaged by, her death? How do you explain tragedy to a child? Do you think Susie's parents do a good job of helping Buckley comprehend the loss of his sister?
8. Susie is killed just as she was beginning to see her mother and father as real people, not just as parents. Watching her parents' relationship change in the wake of her death, she begins to understand how they react to the world and to each other. How does this newfound understanding affect Susie?
9. Can Abigail's choice to leave her family be justified?
10. Why does Abigail leave her dead daughter's photo outside the Chicago Airport on her way back to her family?
11. Susie observes that "The living deserve attention, too." She watches her sister, Lindsay, being neglected as those around her focus all their attention on grieving for Susie. Jack refuses to allow Buckley to use Susie's clothes in his garden. When is it time to let go?
12. Susie's Heaven seems to have different stages, and climbing to the next stage of Heaven requires her to remove herself from what happens on Earth. What is this process like for Susie?
13. In *The Lovely Bones*, adult relationships (Abigail and Jack, Ray's parents) are dysfunctional and troubled, whereas the young relationships (Lindsay and Samuel, Ray and Susie, Ray and Ruth) all seem to have depth, maturity, and potential. What is the author saying about young love? About the trials and tribulations of married life?
14. Is Jack Salmon allowing himself to be swallowed up by his grief? Is there a point where he should have let go? How does his grief process affect his family? Is there something admirable about holding on so tightly to Susie's memory and not denying his profound sadness?
15. Ray and Susie's final physical experience (via Ruth's body) seems to act almost as an exorcism that sweeps away, if only temporarily, Susie's memory of her rape. What is the significance of this act for Susie, and does it serve to counterbalance the violent act that ended Susie's life?
16. Alice Sebold seems to be saying that out of tragedy comes healing. Susie's family fractures and comes back together, a town learns to find strength in each other. Do you agree that good can come of great trauma?



Book: The Lovely Bones (3)

Questions for Teachers

1. Discuss the difference between theme and topic. Identify the most important topics that Sebold deals with in the novel. What is the central theme of *The Lovely Bones*? Readers often talk about relating to a novel. Explain the difference between relating to a topic and relating to a theme. Ask students to think about how they personally relate to the novel. Is it through the emotions of grief, love, healing, and hope? Is it death, personal tragedy, or growing up? Or is it the quest to solve a mystery, or the need to bring closure and move on in life?
2. The first-person omniscient point of view offers the reader insight into all of the characters. How does this add to the suspense of the novel? How does the point of view help delineate the overall theme of the novel?
3. How does Susie describe "her heaven?" What does "her heaven" reflect about her life on Earth?
4. Susie says, "I desired to know what I had not known on Earth. I wanted to be allowed to grow up" (p. 19). Trace her growth from the beginning of the novel to the end. What does Susie learn about her family? Susie says, "I came to believe that if I watched closely, and desired, I might change the lives of those I loved on Earth" (p. 20). Debate whether she has a greater influence on their lives in death than she did in life.
5. Susie Salmon is walking home from school when she encounters Mr. Harvey, her next-door neighbor, and notices that he is looking at her strangely. Why does she follow him into the cornfield? Discuss how Mr. Harvey lures Susie to his secret hideout. What should Susie have done when she first encountered Mr. Harvey? What can young adults learn from the tragedy of Susie's death?
6. The police question Mr. Harvey after Susie's disappearance, but they immediately dismiss him as a suspect. At what point in the novel does Susie's father begin to believe that Mr. Harvey might be connected to his daughter's disappearance? It turns out that Mr. Harvey has murdered other young girls and women. How has he managed to elude the police for so many years?
7. Discuss why Sebold includes details about Mr. Harvey's childhood. How does this help the reader understand his motivation?
8. Why does Mr. Harvey pull the bike charm off Susie's bracelet and put it in his pocket? What is the significance of the bike charm in solving the crime?
9. Discuss how each member of the Salmon family deals with their grief. Why is it so difficult for them to grieve together? How does Susie explain the "Walking Dead Syndrome" (p. 59)? Explain why Lindsey is the most vulnerable to this. Why doesn't Lindsey use her last name at the gifted camp she attends? At what point does Lindsey let go of Susie's death and begin living her own life?
10. Buckley tells his friend Nate that he has seen and talked to Susie. Discuss whether he really sees her, or if she is a figment of his imagination and his own version of play therapy. Why doesn't Buckley want to tell his mother about seeing Susie? If he told his mother, what do you think she would say to him? Discuss how the concept of "gone" or "death" should be explained to a young child.
11. Principal Caden organizes a memorial service for Susie. Explain why Mr. Caden thinks the service is so important. Why doesn't Ray Singh attend? Discuss Ruth's father's attitude toward the service. In reference to her father, Susie says, "Today he would not have to pretend he was getting back to normal whatever nor-mal was. Today he could walk tall with grief and so could Abigail" (p. 109). Discuss whether the memorial service really helps the Salmons deal with their grief.



Book: The Lovely Bones (3)

Questions for Teachers (Continued):

12. What is the purpose of the brief romantic scene between Abigail Salmon and Len Fenerman? Discuss whether Abigail's need to leave home is really related to Susie's death. How might her daughter's death be an excuse for doing something that she has needed to do for a long time? Debate whether Abigail's choice to leave her family can be justified.
13. Why does Abigail leave Susie's picture outside the Chicago airport on her way back to her family?
14. What is Lindsey's role in helping her father deal with his grief? Why does she insist that they take Buckley to the ceremony the neighbors are having for Susie in the cornfield? At which point does Jack Salmon really begin dealing with his grief? How does his own life-threatening experience help him see the importance of moving on?
15. Discuss whether Abigail comes to her husband's bed-side out of guilt, or because she really wants to be with him. What is Buckley's reaction to his mom when she comes home?
16. How is Ruth an important secondary character in the novel? Discuss why Sebold includes the scene where Susie inhabits Ruth's body and fulfills one of her great-est wishes, making love with Ray.
17. Explain the following statement: "Horror on Earth is real and it is every day. It is like a flower or like the sun; it cannot be contained" (p. 186).
18. Susie's heaven seems to have different stages, and climbing to the next stage of heaven requires her to remove herself from what happens on Earth. What is this process like for Susie?
19. What is the purpose of the section in the novel called "Snapshots" (p. 212)?
20. Tone is an important element in a novel because it relates the attitude of the narrator and reveals the writer's point of view to his or her audience. Discuss the tone of *The Lovely Bones*.
21. Explain the title of the novel. Discuss the effectiveness of waiting until the end of the novel to reveal the meaning of the title.